



**HEBRIDES FERRY STAKEHOLDER GROUP**  
**(Barra, the Uists, Lewis and Harris)**

Minute of Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Stornoway and virtually through Microsoft Teams, on  
Tuesday 4 June 2024 at 10.30am.

IN ATTENDANCE	<p><b>COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR</b> Cllr. Uisdean Robertson (Chair) Cllr. Iain A Macneil Cllr. Duncan Macinnes MBE Cllr Iain M Macleod Cllr Susan Thomson Cllr Mustapha Hocine Mr Kenneth Morrison Mrs Linda Cunningham Mrs Shona Hadwen (Clerk) Mrs Fiona Maciver</p> <p><b>TRANSPORT SCOTLAND</b> Mr William Millar Mr Brian Gordon Ms Liz Jack Mr Mark Hoskins Ms Ashley Jones Ms Lyndsey Whiteside Mr Dominic Calgie</p> <p><b>CALEDONIAN MACBRAYNE LTD (CALMAC)</b> Mr Finlay Macrae Ms Donna Lockhart</p> <p><b>FERRIES COMMUNITIES BOARD</b> No attendees</p> <p><b>CALEDONIAN MARITIME ASSETS LTD. (CMAL)</b> Ms Blair Moglia Mr Chris Fisher</p> <p><b>HITRANS</b> Mr Neil Macrae Mr Ranald Robertson</p> <p><b>THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL</b> Cllr Calum Munro</p> <p><b>HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ENTERPRISE (HIE)</b> Ms Joanna Peteranna Mr Nicolas Sobey</p>
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	<p><b>OUTER HEBRIDES COMMERCE GROUP</b> Ms Gail Robertson</p> <p><b>CONFEDERATION OF PASSENGER TRANSPORT</b> No attendees</p> <p><b>OUTER HEBRIDES TOURISM</b> Mr Alan Graham Mr Sarah Maclean</p> <p><b>ULLAPOOL HARBOUR TRUST</b> Mr Kevin Peach</p> <p><b>STORNOWAY PORT AUTHORITY</b> Mr Alex Macleod</p>
APOLOGIES	Mr Andrew McIvor (Highland Council) Mr Kevin Hobs (CMAL) Mr Ker Corbett (Scottish Citylink) Mr Angus Campbell (Ferries Community Board) Ms Fiona Galbraith (CalMac)

Minute of Meeting 1 The Minute of the Meeting of 7 December 2023 was approved.  
held on 7  
December 2023

Matters Arising 2 Action Tracker	With reference to item 2 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 December 2023, HITRANS submitted the Action Tracker detailing updates on the action points for all the Ferry Stakeholder Groups.  The Report was noted.
Caledonian MacBrayne Operations, Commercial and Performance Update covering (CFL)	With reference to item 3 of the Minute of the meeting of 7 December 2023, Finlay Macrae (FM) of CalMac provided information on the activities of CalMac covering the period October 2023 to March 2024.  <b>Route Performance</b>  An update on performance for each of the ferry routes within the Hebrides area was provided.  <b>Stornoway Ullapool</b> – good degree of reliability, with adjustments around timetables to allow for the Hebrides going back and fore as a result of works at Uig Pier.  <b>Uig-Tarbert-Lochmaddy</b> – Uig Harbour was closed in January and MV Hebrides did daily return sailings from Ullapool to Lochmaddy. The Tarbert service was closed for the duration and the traffic accommodated on the Loch Seaforth. MV Alfred was deployed to cover the first part of MV Hebrides overhaul, due to the delay in the

return of the Clansman. CalMaC wish to extend their thanks to all agencies and customers for their flexibility during that time.

**Sound of Harris** - Issues on the Sound of Harris with the MV Loch Portain towards the end of 2023. The MV Loch Bhrusda operated for a prolonged period of time due to the delay in MV Loch Portain's overhaul and struggled with capacity as the start of the summer timetable approached. that was rectified but it has highlighted issues with a specialist vessel on a specialist route.

**Sound of Barra** – operated largely without issues.

Cllr MacNeil asked a question in relation to the possibility of increasing the number of sailings or capacity on board the vessel on the Sound of Barra. He highlighted that it was difficult to get a booking, yet he could get on the ferry if he just turned up, despite not having a ticket for that particular sailing.

FM responded by informing members that CalMac are pulling together a varied package of suggested service enhancements and timetabling improvements for a number of routes, not just in the Outer Hebrides. FM went on to explain other options that were being looked at in terms of extra tonnage to assist on the route, FM acknowledged that there were issues with the booking system, mainly down to connectivity issues at either side of this service meaning that the system is not able to recognise when scanning a ticket, that it is not for that sailing, therefore meaning that it doesn't free up a space on the pre-booked sailing. CalMac are looking at a solution for this.

Cllr Macneil asked a further question regarding re-introducing the shuttle service on the Sound of Barra that had been in operation a couple of years ago. FM explained the issues with crew, and the logistics of getting this in place as it is a longer route. CalMac are tied with crew for the smaller vessels and a number of vessels are in for various repairs, so do not have the crew resource at the moment. FM to the suggestion of a shuttle service on the Sound of Barra back to the control room and the fleet management to check if there is an option, particularly if there is a lot of traffic on either side.

FM sought confirmation from Cllr Macneil if he was formally requesting that the timetable on the Sound of Barra be suspended and the shuttle service be introduced as before. Cllr Macneil confirmed this.

**Action: FM to take forward Cllr MacNeils request for the Sound of Barra timetable to revert to shuttle service and report back to the group.**

**Lochboisdale-Mallaig-Oban** - Had adjustments on this route prescribed by the Uig pier closure. MV Lord of the Isles operated an enhanced timetable between Oban and Mallaig during the Uig closure. As a result of extensions to other overhauls, the winter timetable continued to be operated by MV Hebridean Isles which was a shared service with Barra for February and the beginning of March.

**Barra-Oban** - The service operated without issue for the majority of the winter. Due to delays in MV Isle of Lewis overhaul, the Barra service operated a triangular service with Lochboisdale for a longer period than planned with MV Hebridean Isles. Traffic

during this period was prioritised with lifeline freight being accommodated in the first instance.

The majority of the small vessels operated as expected.

#### **Marketing and Customer Experience**

The new Customer Experience measurement platform (RADAR) is now live and CalMac have moved to Real time measurement of the customer experience. It focuses on five touchpoints – Web, CEC, Port, Vessel and Journey. It's a better way of capturing information and feeding back to the wider organisation. This will allow for better data. It's live data, a customer experience or a problem with the service will enable CalMac to respond more quickly.

#### **Timetabling**

Have fallen out of sequence with timetabling but CalMac are working on rectifying this so that timetables are set a year in advance.

#### **Questions:**

Further questions were raised on the new booking system with issues being experienced at several ports, Lochmaddy-Uig was used as a recent example whereby customers are told the ferry is full so they have to go on stand-by but always get on the sailing and there is plenty of capacity on the sailings. It was acknowledged that the new booking system should make it easier to recognise when cancellations are made, but this does not seem to be happening.

Clarity was sought on when the re-mapping of the vessel co-ordinates would be taking place as this was having an impact on the accuracy of the booking systems overall. Work has been ongoing with adjusting vessel capacities but are looking at reviewing this for all vessels.

Discussions were also held around the new booking system. It was noted that the new booking systems was a contract asset purchased for the CHFS contract and having spent over £18m on the new system, Transfer Scotland should be having some accountability around this as it had been live for over a year.

Members noted the Report and the Chair thanked Mr Macrae for his update.

Transport Scotland 4  
Update

With reference to item 4 of the Minute of the Meeting of 7 December 2023, Transport Scotland (TS) submitted a Report updating members on the following initiatives:

#### **Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP)**

The Report stated that the draft ICP Strategic Approach paper and an updated draft of the Vessels and Ports Plan were published on Thursday 1 February 2024 with the public consultation ending on Monday 6 May 2024.

Alongside the public consultation, public engagement took place, accompanied on most Clyde & Hebrides visits by colleagues from the CHFS3 team.

A total of 164 responses were received to the online consultation, and 45 non-standard responses.

As well as inviting more general community views on ferry services the Report went on to state that island specific issues around Community Voice and Transparency, Accessibility, and Onwards and Connecting Travel were explored. Feedback gathered from events had all been submitted to contractors drafting a consultation and engagement analysis report, due to be completed during June and intending to be published in July.

### **Community Needs Assessment**

The Report stated that a “baseline study” was underway to fulfil steps 1-3 of the Community Needs Assessment (CAN) methodology for the CHFS/NFIS networks. This exercise would analyse data from the CHFS and NIFS ferry operators and other sources. For each existing CHFS or NIFS route, the study would:

- Categorise the current timetabled route service level
- Identify the route connectivity provided by the service in both summer and winter and integration with onward and connecting travel
- Analyse service performance, including consideration of reliability, punctuality, carryings, and capacity utilisation

The information would be used as the starting point for transport needs assessments for each community. It would identify options to address issues and opportunities for changes to current services by engaging with communities and other stakeholders.

The Report provided information on a provisional programme of future studies with priority given to areas where outputs would inform the business cases for existing or pipeline vessel and/or port projects.

### **Ferry Fares Policy**

The Report stated that following the inclusion of the Fair Fares Review ferry fares recommendation in the ICP Strategic Approach paper, work was being undertaken to develop option for the 4 short-term fares proposals (also set out in the Fair Fares Review report);

- Retain road equivalent tariff (RET) for island residents and consider fares for non-islanders, particularly vehicle fares during the summer timetable period;
- Review and update the RET formulae as a key element of the above work;
- Provide free foot passenger travel on inter-island ferries for under 22-year old island residents within the Outer Hebrides, Orkney, and Shetland Island groups;
- Extend the existing National Ferry Concessionary Scheme to under 22-year old island residents.

Discussions with ferry operators, other Transport Scotland teams and external stakeholders were ongoing and draft working papers on the proposals had been prepared.

### **Onward and Connecting Travel (OCT)**

The Report stated that the Onward and Connective Travel work programme was ongoing and would seek to identify and prioritise ways to improve the connectivity of the networks with other transport modes, as well as key locations and facilities. There would be a particular focus on public transport links as well as active and other sustainable transport provision.

A scoping document with key themes had been developed and further work would be undertaken in the second half of 2024.

### **Low Carbon**

Work was increasing on Low Carbon as staff time has been freed up from other current priorities and the initial focus would be to feed into the next Scottish Government Climate Change Plan.

### **Impact Assessments**

The intention would be to publish final versions of all impact assessments at the conclusion of the ICP development.

### **CHFS3 Update**

Transport Scotland submitted a report which updated members on the progress to date with the award of an appropriate replacement for the current CHFS2 contract. The preference of a direct award of the next CHFS contract to CalMac is subject to a due diligence exercise to confirm a feasible approach from a legal, financial, and operational perspective.

The Report provided further information on the CHFS2 contract extension and due diligence around this. Due to the number of complex issues and processes still being worked through, it was clear that the work could not be completed by September 2024 which is the expiry date of the current contract and as such the Scottish Government decided to implement an extension of the current contract of up to 12 months to enable the work, and associated Scottish Government assurance processes to be concluded prior to the final decision being made on the procurement route for the next contract. This would also provide greater certainty for both island communities and operational staff.

Information was also provided on the implications and benefits of going down a direct award route and it was emphasised that a direct award would not be a reinforcement of existing habits, but intended to act as a catalyst for change.

The Report further stated that Transport Scotland are actively engaging with island communities and stakeholder about the future of ferry services and the next CHFS contract. This engagement process is ongoing and would continue throughout the contract drafting process.

During discussion, William Millar of Transport Scotland provided an answer to a previously asked question about the new e-booking system -.Mr Millar explained that the system is overseen by the Assurance Board which meets to see the project through to completion. Although the system is operational, there are a number of

modifications that are going on including software updates. It is hoped that once the updates are complete that the system will migrate to essentially be business as usual.

Following on from earlier comments and frustrations around the e-booking system, further comments were made around the economical impact being felt by island communities as a result of inaccurate information being made available to passengers when going on to book their ferry journey. Many, it was felt have gone elsewhere for their holidays as, as far as they are concerned, they cannot get a ferry booking on the new e-booking system. The data is not live and this is having a huge financial impact to island businesses and the local economy.

The general view of members of the Group was that the new Ar Turas booking system was not value for taxpayer money and that instead of making things better for the islands, it was having a negative impact on islanders and the economy.

The Chair thanked Transport Scotland for the update.

Action: William Millar to raise issue as to the responsibility for Ar Turas as a Contract Asset and how Transport Scotland are managing the ongoing issues with it through contractual performance measures at Assurance board with a view to explaining how this process is working to Stakeholders.

Action: TS to consider opportunity for joint FCB and FSG session on CHFS3 to support strategic engagement.

**Action – TS to consider opportunity for joint FCB and FSG session on CHFS3 to support strategic engagement.**

CMAL Update	5	<p>With reference to item 6 of the Minute of the Meeting of 7 December 2023, CMAL submitted a report updating members regarding the overall activities and projects underway for both Vessels and Port Infrastructure. The Following items were highlighted.</p> <p><b>Vessels:</b> All four ferries being built in Cemre; Turkey are on track and the delivery dates were provided in the Report. All four vessels would be broadly identical and would provide resilience to the fleet.</p> <p>The Small Vessel Replacement Programme (SVRP) concept design has concluded, and the safety cases have been approved in principle by MCA. The Outline Business Case for the SVRP (7 vessels) is currently being considered by Ministers and includes the potential approach to procurement. Once SVRP Phase 1 is underway the attention would turn to Phase 2 which is an additional 3 vessels making 10 in total. They will be fully electric vehicles with a back-up diesel generator which would only be used should there be an overnight power outage.</p> <p>The Mallaig/Lochboisdale vessel replacement programme is underway with concept design consultants LMG Marin of Norway having been appointed. The business case for the project is underway and awaits further development of design before being presented to Transport Scotland by end of Q2 2024 and finalised by the end of Q3 2024.</p>
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**Port Infrastructure:** Updates were provided on the various port infrastructure projects. The following were highlighted:

**The Gasay Terminal Development** project team are in the process of reviewing and agreeing parameters including “do minimum” option, to enable formal options to be included in the updated Outline Business Case. A gateway review has already been undertaken and there are four options to be considered. 1 – Do nothing; 2 Rebuild Lochboisdale on the same site it is on presently. 3 -Relocate to Gasay. 4 – Relocate to Gasay but to do this on a minimum. Plan to do consultation on the options by the end of 2024 but they are still looking for funding.

**Action – Chair to write to Cabinet Secretary to highlight concerns about the time it has taken to review different infrastructure upgrade options at Lochboisdale**

**SSEN** -Work continues with SSEN regarding shore power and charging for the all-electric ferries delivered by the Small Vessel Replacement Programme. SoPN has been prepared for the Tarbert Harris shore power upgrade, with the project due to commence shortly.

**General Update:** Kevin Hobbs of TS attended the Cross-Party Group for Shipping and Maritime to present on the “decarbonisation of ports and vessels” to both ministers and key business associated from across Scotland’s Maritime sectors. The goal of the meeting was to share best practice and raise the profile for the positive changes that are coming to MCLA in regard to decarbonisation.

Updates were provided on various community engagement events which continues through their stakeholder engagement and communications strategy. CMAL will continue to work closely with all stakeholders on official engagement as part of the CHFS3 discussions. This will be in relation to the Community Board, the Ferry Stakeholder Group and local Ferry Committees.

A question was asked in relation to the slipways on either side of the Sound of Barra. FM was aware that this may have been raised before and had already been taken into consideration in relation to the new ferry but he would look into it and feedback.

Members agreed to note the report and the Chair thanked CMAL for their update.

Other Infrastructure Providers Update	6	With reference to item 7 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 December 2023, updates were provided on various ports around the Hebrides.
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**Stornoway Port Authority**

Alex Macleod of Stornoway Port Authority notified members that the Passenger Access System was still broken. They are working with CalMac to find another solution for over the summer months. Whilst not as good as the current system should be, it would mean that passengers could get on and off the ferry more quickly. Hopefully a substantive update would be received in the next couple of weeks.

**Action: Cal Mac to update on status of passenger access at Stornoway in next couple of weeks**

**Ullapool Harbour Trust**

Kevin Peach reported that they had just had a pre-summer inspection which was good. It does not seem so busy with tourists as yet. A suggestion had been made with regards to finding a solution for baggage transfers to and from Stornoway and an update would be provided at the next meeting.

**Uig Harbour - Skye**

The Report informed members that the new terminal building would be completed by March 25. FM noted that the new linkspan sits further back. Questions were asked about ensuring that this doesn't happen again in the future. Transport Scotland commented that lessons learned would be highlighted and that it should not be the case whereby a harbour ends up with less than they had before.

**CnES**

Kenny Morrison, Harbour Master provided an update on the new Lochmaddy Pier which had been officially opened in February by the Transport Minister, Fiona Hyslop. There are still a few snagging issues to attend to. Regarding Otternish pier, currently improvements to the moorings and fenders are taking place, hopefully completed over the summer.

**Action: Kenny Morrison to share lessons learned from Little Minch project when it is completed**

The Chair thanked the various port authorities for their updates.

Communities Board      7  
Update

With reference to item 8 of the Minute of the Meeting of 7 December 2023 a Report was submitted with an update on the activities of the Board since the last meeting.

A summary of all meetings attended was provided, these included engagement sessions in the Isle of Bute with the local Housing Association as well as an open consultation meeting. Both were well attended.

The main Board meeting included sessions with CMal, Transport Scotland and CalMac management. The Board had also met twice with the Young Islanders Network learning new perspectives from the younger generation along with seeing how their aspirations match with wider asks.

The Board also met with the DML board on future planning for the service and discussed the challenges and performance of the new ticketing system.

The Report stated that the Board hoped to meet with the Minister in June and have had further interaction with the Net Zero committee of Parliament.

The Report was noted.

HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy Consultation 8 HITRANS submitted a Report informing members of the Regional Transport Strategy Consultation. The Report provided a background on the Strategy, explaining that HITRANS has a statutory duty under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 to produce a Regional Transport Strategy (RTS). Working with local authority partners, HITRANS is in the process of producing a new RTS for the development of transport in the region over the next circa 20 years with the aim of delivering a transport system that reduces inequalities, takes climate action, helps deliver inclusive economic growth, and improves the health and wellbeing of people in the region.

Neil Macrae informed members that the draft strategy was currently out for public consultation until 14 June 2024. The Report went on to inform members of the three stages of the development of the RTS, details about the Statutory Consultation, the RTS Vision, Objectives and in-depth information on each of its themes and policies.

The Chair thanked HITRANS for their update and members agreed to note the Report.

Date of Next 9 The next meeting is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 3 December 2024 at 10:30am via MS Teams.  
Meeting